



A Breakfast Row

by Karen Folger Jacobs

(On many bodies of water in this country and at its edges, pencil-thin racing shells are not the appropriate vessel. Other craft, both historical and modern, fixed seat and sliding seat, are being used to race, to get a good workout, or just to explore. The Dolphin Club, in San Francisco, has a number of rowing boats which are suitable for the open waters of San Francisco Bay. The following story describes a weekend row across the Bay for breakfast.)

My eagerness grows as I help push the 40 by 4½ foot *Wieland* down the Dolphin Club pier. This expedition for six across San Francisco Bay requires more coordination and muscle than my weekly Bay rows with Lyrinda Snyderman in one of the club's dozen Whitehalls. Before we launch the *Wieland*, whiffs from the Bay preview the sensory marine pleasures which will soon surround us.

Tugging the 2,500 pound barge off its dolly strains my shoulder joints. A century ago, men honed this vessel from oak and Port Orford cedar. The March 1900 issue of *Outing* noted, "In 1887, the Dolphin Club acquired a handsome pleasure barge which was named John Wieland in honor of one of the charter members." He brewed Wieland Beer.

We slide the *Wieland* down the apron and into the brackish cove called Aquatic Park, a triangular body of water bounded by the shoreline park where cable cars turn around and by two piers whose ends almost converge. Lyrinda's husband, stroke Neal Snyderman, a former junior national singles champion, assigns positions. My bow seat will enable me to watch the others, but also to receive the most spray. I lace in my feet from my port seat before inserting

my 12-foot sweep oar into a starboard rowlock, necessary in the wide barge with no outriggers. The next rower, at two, sits starboard to row a port sweep.

We delicately avoid two Dolphins [club members] swimming in the 56° waters and aim for the cove's opening to the bay. As we pull past the Hyde Street pier, a National Park Service museum of historical ships, a ranger waves at us from the C.A. Thayer, a three-masted lumber schooner whose maiden voyage carried Douglas fir to Fiji in 1896. Then we glide by the Alma, a flat-bottomed sailing hay scow which plied the Sacramento Delta. Beyond public access, the pier features only seagulls and cormorants who stare down at us from atop the pilings.

Entering the open bay, we start rowing seriously. The typical summer morning fog seems suspended over the bay, hiding the Golden Gate Bridge except for the bases of its towers, covering the buildings on Alcatraz (Spanish for pelican).

Steadily, Neal increases the pace until we cruise along at about five knots. The tide nears the end of a flood so we must aim west of our destination. I settle into rowing, soaking up the scenery, salty air, and the spray regularly lashing my back. My eyes scan the horizon for harbor seals or pelicans who fly in formation near the waves, ready to dip down and then up with a live snack wriggling in their gullets. Above, at the bottom of the rising fog, small terns float like eagles, seemingly carefree until one plummets down for a specific morsel.

Human traffic passes only on sailboats billowed swiftly along by colorful spinnakers. Underneath us sway luminaria kelp, a seaweed lined with herring eggs. Dolphin Michael Koga used to harvest this delicacy for sale to Japanese gourmet markets.

On the rocky shores of Alcatraz, some sea lions

spread their bulk to bask in the bright sun which has now burned off all the fog. I wonder, did Al Capone enjoy the view? Did he ever notice the *Wieland* row by?

Beyond the isle, a large patch of choppy water indicates the mixing of the tides. These staccato formations present no hazards to our craft. Treacherous places are the back eddies which sometimes swirl east of Alcatraz or at the shores of the Golden Gate. The contradictory energies of blending tides jostle century-old creaks from the *Wieland*.

Soon we pass into the other tide and row towards Angel Island, which rises to almost a thousand feet. Earlier in this century, Chinese immigrants were detained here, some for decades. Now it is a state park serviced by ferries and overpopulated by white-tailed deer. Only the Tiburon Straits separate the north end of the island from the lush mainland of Tiburon (Spanish for shark).

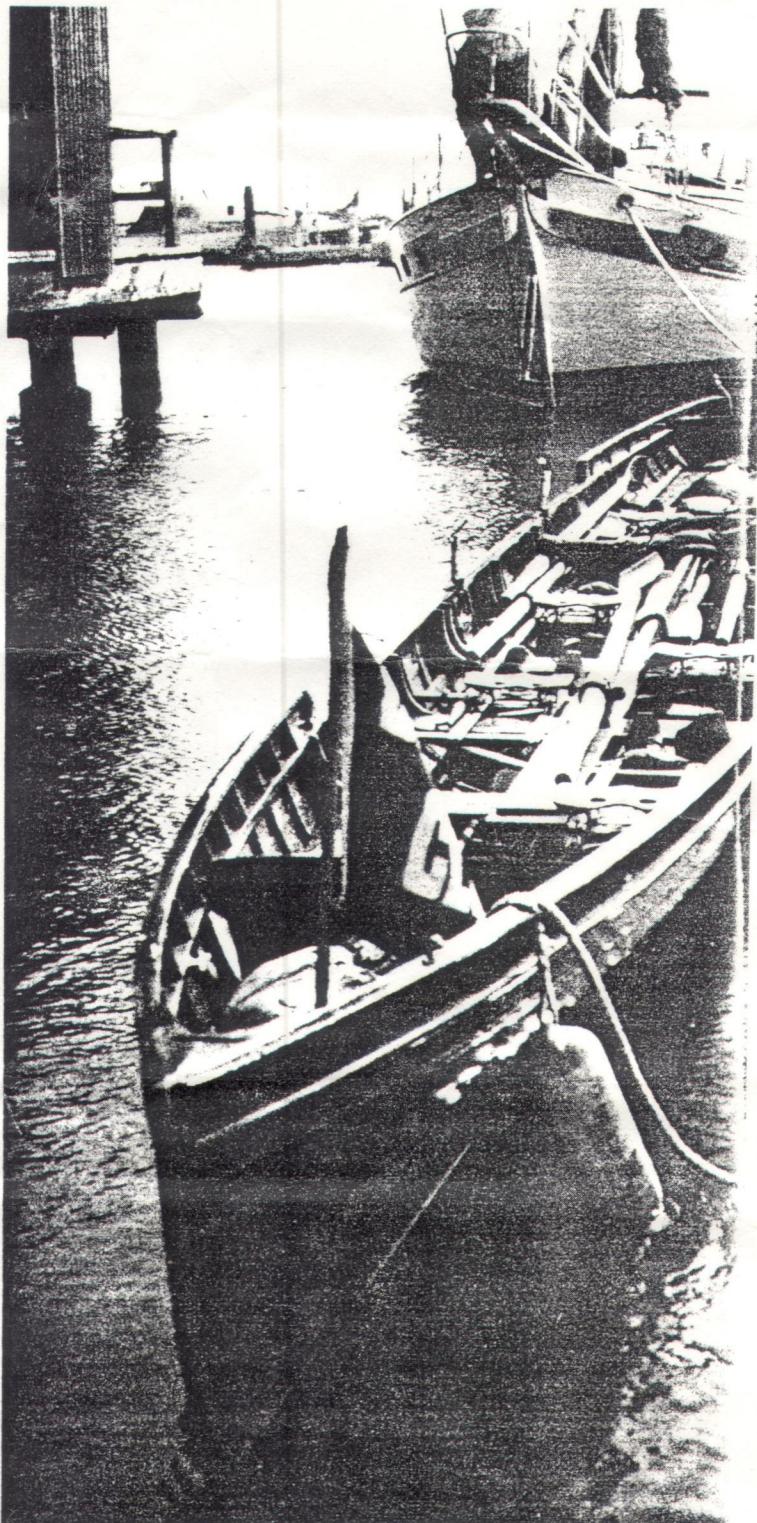
We row to Sam's, the only waterfront restaurant with a floating pier long enough for the *Wieland*. We bail and then sponge out our boat. Then in the lavatories we scrub our hands and rinse off our salty faces with tap water, in preparation for breakfast.

On the large deck of round tables we are conspicuous: bigger, stronger, not fashionably attired and we finish our hearty breakfasts. Luxuriating in the midday sun, we discuss our five-mile row. However, we cannot linger too long given the increasing winds of summer afternoons. Already the trees bend considerably on the crests of Tiburon and Belvedere.

Tiburon recedes as we stroke away. The rough sea is exciting. We pull hard, cutting across the high winds and the tide. I concentrate on the back of the next rower. Across his muscles stretches the Dolphin Club's rowing shirt, printed "Bene Remiga et Vive," Latin for "Row Well and Live Well." This motto hung on Roman galleys two thousand years ago. Now it inspires me.

The *Wieland* rolls comfortably across the swells. Sometimes on the recovery we have to dip our hands way down to keep our blades above a wave. Determined to contribute my share, I reach forward to catch closer to the bow. The rougher it gets, the more adrenalin flows in my bloodstream. And the colder my hands get: I pull with my palms now since my fingers can no longer grip. Around us, birds fly faster, whitecaps crash and the few remaining sailboats heel way over. Our synchronized moves speed

photo: Lyrinda Snyderman



The Wieland

this barge through the high seas. No one speaks for at least half an hour: the *Wieland* creaks loudly.

Suddenly the surging stops. The switch to milder water happened as we entered the cove. This sheltered place seems like home: I swim the mile around it frequently. We slow down to navigate through numerous swimming Dolphins. Aboard the crowded *Thayer*, tourists raise their cameras to capture our image.

We drift to the end of the apron. Painter in hand, I step out and then pull the gunwale alongside so the others can step out. Now comes the most demanding job: hauling more than a ton of wood out of the bay.

Down the pier jog a few of the hundred regular Dolphin rowers, including Club President Herman Zahler, a former shipwright; Bill Walden; boat captain Ned Hoffman; and Dino Landucci, 78, a Dolphin

for over 50 years. Although the club had a tradition of males only, with fathers leading sons into membership, women were admitted after one hundred years and a lawsuit. Recently, my father, John Jacobs, followed me into the club, a half century after he sculled the Charles River as a collegian.

On "one, two, three, heave!" fifteen Dolphins strain to lift the *Wieland*. With one numb hand over the other, I grip the side to help. Gradually, we get the *Wieland* onto the pier and up on the dolly. Easily we wheel her up the pier, hose her outside and wipe her insides. Then she is rolled into her 41-foot shed.

When I log in the *Wieland*, I think about a century of Dolphins rowing our wooden boats. Before resuming my land life, I hug the other rowers, many of them men in their 60s or 70s. They provide my physical role model for later years: strong agile bodies that can row across the bay for breakfast.

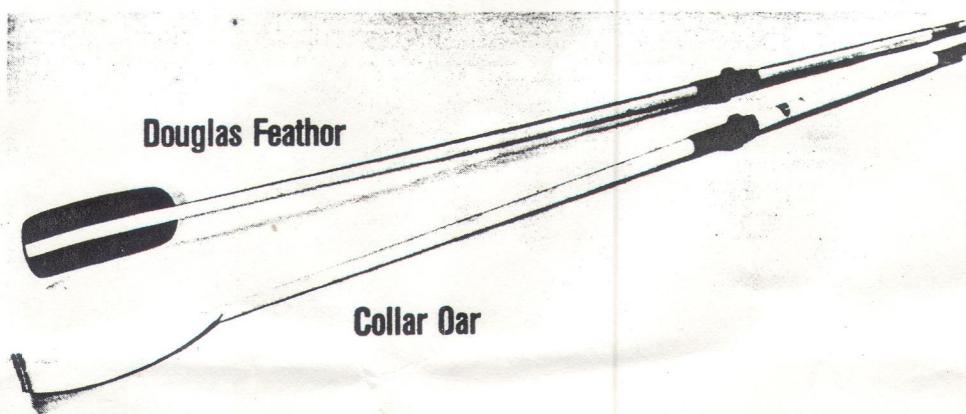
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Douglas Feathor



Collar Oar

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